

**Westphal, Uwe: Fashion Metropolis Berlin 1836-1939: The Story of the Rise and Destruction of the Jewish Fashion Industry.** Leipzig: Seemann Henschel, 2019.

(Westphal, Uwe: Modemetropole Berlin 1836-1939. Entstehung und Zerstörung der jüdischen Konfektionshäuser. Henschel Verlag, Leipzig 2019. 271 S., 180 Abb., ISBN 978-3-89487-806-1.

New edition of Uwe Westphal, *Berliner Konfektion und Mode 1836-1939. Die Zerstörung einer Tradition*. Hentrich & Hentrich, Berlin, 1. Aufl. 1986, 2. Aufl. 1992. ISBN 3 89468 044 X.)



Old mistakes newly laid out – after thirty years, the journalist Uwe Westphal has reissued his book *Berliner Konfektion und Mode 1836-1939: Die Zerstörung einer Tradition* (*Berlin Confection and Fashion 1836-1939: The Destruction of a Tradition*), which first appeared in 1986 as one of the first publications on “Aryanization” in the Berlin textile industry, under a new title and with another publishing house. The history of the Berlin ready-made clothing industry remains an important topic that needs to be engaged with today, and to which various scholars and researchers have been devoting themselves for years. It is regrettable that Westphal, after all these years, does not introduce any new findings into his research, only slightly reformulates the text, republishes incorrect information without checking it, ignores the current state of research, and does not cross-check and critically question the eyewitness interviews he often uses.

In his foreword Westphal says that for decades there has been no memory in Berlin and Germany of “the great style icons of fashion that made history,” namely “the Jewish designers.” In Berlin, “the city of crime,” one knows “almost nothing about it,” and his book represents “maybe one last chance to remember” (pp. 10-11). But he does not use this opportunity.

Westphal is not in dialogue with other scholars, fashion history researchers, or contemporary historians who have also been working on the subject for many years. He does not mention either Gesa Kessemeyer’s detailed research on the fashion house Herrmann Gerson – *Ein Feentempel der Mode* (*A Fairy Temple of Fashion*, 2013) and *Herrmann Gerson – Das erste Berliner Modekaufhaus* (*Herrmann Gerson – The First Berlin Fashion Department Store*, 2016), nor the research conducted in cooperation with Dr. Benedikt Goebel, by the society *Aktives*

*Museum* and the German Foreign Office, who installed a memorial stele at Werderscher Markt in Berlin for the fashion house Herrmann Gerson and the families Gerson and Freudenberg. He also did not take note of the exhibition “Geraubte Mitte” (Stolen Centre) of the *Stadtmuseum Berlin* (2013/2014), curated by Benedikt Goebel, Lutz Mauersberger and Gesa Kessemeier, which focused on numerous textile industrialist families. Other renowned fashion historians, such as Christine Waidenschlager, head of the Fashion Department at the *Stiftung Stadtmuseum*, now *Kunstgewerbemuseum*, with her exhibitions and catalogs, including *Die Mode der Zwanziger Jahre* (1991) or *Berliner Chic* (2001); Gretel Wagner, former director of the *Lipperheide Costume Library*, and her essay “Die Mode in Berlin” (1993); or researchers like Irene Günther, author of *Nazi Chic* (2004), none of these important exhibitions, publications, and informed scientific research are mentioned by Westphal.

But this lack of exchange and the concealment of existing research, which has often been scientifically critical of Westphal's results, is damaging to his book. It remains on the surface, spreading myths and false details about the founding history of the Berlin clothing industry, the most famous fashion salons of the 1920s and “Aryanizations.”

For example: N. Israel and Rudolph Hertzog, both of whom, according to the current state of research on the middle of the 19th century, were fabric merchants who only started selling women’s clothing after 1895, are described by Westphal as co-founders of the Berlin ladies’ clothing industry in the 1830s.

For the 1920s, the model engineering company Norbert Jutschenka is a good example. Although it was not founded until 1931, Westphal presents it unchecked as one of the most important companies of the 1920s, as “one of the leading businesses” that gave “essential impulses for fashionable Berlin life” (p. 244). Many renowned fashion houses, such as Clara Böhm, Clara Schultz, or Moritz Hammer, but also fashion designers, such as Johanna Marbach, and Erna Becker, who really shaped the image of the fashion metropolis Berlin in those years, are not mentioned in the book.

Westphal also gives free rein to his imagination in the “Aryanisation stories,” which are important to tell, but in the correct form. Alleged testimonies of the time are not scientifically examined or questioned. Thus, he claims “an anonymous contemporary witness,” when it is clearly identifiable as the company of Norbert Jutschenka by his address, Mohrenstraße 19, because only this company was in the house in 1938. The statement was made by his daughter about the alleged events of the takeover of her father’s company on the day after the *Reichspogrom Nacht*, on November 10, 1938 (pp. 23-24). The whole event is described in a cinematic manner: “‘Now the company belongs to me,’ he said. When my father picked up the phone, the lawyer put his hand on it and forbade any phone calls.” However, files of the Berlin State Archive clearly show that the company Norbert Jutschenka had long been forced to sell by that time. The contract had come into force in July 1938, with the approval by the German authorities in September 1938. Norbert Jutschenka was already in New York with his wife during the sale of the company. All sales negotiations were conducted by his lawyer. The dramatic story is therefore fictitious.

The bibliography, which is a scientific standard, remained almost unchanged in the new edition, and is only two pages long; the annotations are only one and a half pages long (82 annotations), in a book of almost 300 pages.

Archive material, which is available in Berlin, is numerous and would bring many new insights, was not evaluated. None of the footnotes refer to archival material that was previously unknown to fashion scholars.

Many passages in the text lack scientific references. This is particularly striking in the case of titles such as “Haute Couture in Auschwitz” (pp. 132-135), which is only documented in the text by the mention of a “documentary novel” (p. 132) from 2017. It remains unmentioned that Irene Guenther already dealt with the topic comprehensively and with detailed references to sources in 2004. In other places, such as the description of the first Poiret fashion shows by Herrmann Gerson in Berlin in 1910 (see p. 56), Westphal also plagiarises the findings of other researchers without any credit. He uses concrete details from Gesa Kessemeier’s essay “Visionäre der Mode und der Raumkunst” (Visionaries of Fashion and Spatial Art), published in 2015, in the commemorative publication of the *Verein für die Geschichte Berlins*, without attributing the work to her.

Even his appendix “Companies and Emigrants from Berlin Ladies’ Ready-Made Clothing,” which had been taken over almost unchanged from the first edition, was not fundamentally revised, as one might have expected after thirty years. A great opportunity was lost here, since with today’s means, the evaluation of address books, archival material, and digitalized files, numerous new pieces of information could have been compiled. The information is often incorrect, vague, and incomplete, and does not stand up to scientific examination and comparison with address books and official archival information.

Westphal also focuses, without reflection, almost exclusively on large companies around the Hausvogteiplatz. The fashion salons in the Tiergartenviertel or on Kurfürstendamm, which represented the face of the fashion city of Berlin, and which can be described as the “style icons of fashion” (p. 10), are only to be found in passing and with false information, or not at all.

The following list includes some blatant errors that experts immediately notice:

- Westphal lists the famous fashion house August Kuhnen from the *Tiergartenviertel* as “Paul Kuhnen” (p. 245), as it was in the first editions from 1986 and 1992. Further information about one of the most famous fashion houses of the 1920s and its exciting history is missing.
- He lists an “Arthur Goetz” as the owner of a fashion salon at *Kurfürstendamm 210*, which did not even exist, and ascribes to him in short form a part of the biography of Richard Goetz, who ran the renowned Goetz fashion salon at *Kurfürstendamm 213* between 1927 and 1938. But Westphal is completely unaware of the real fate of Richard Goetz and his exciting fight for justice: Goetz was the only well-known Berlin couturier who personally participated in a reparation trial in Berlin in the 1950s.
- He describes Norbert Jutschenka as “one of the leading shops in the model genre for women’s clothing” (p. 244) in the 1920s and among the “first to ensure a 'democratic sense of dress' in Berlin” (p. 103), even though the company was officially (according to the files of the LAB 1.2.1931) only founded in the early 1930s, and was only active in the model wholesale sector, i.e. as a wholesaler and above all for export. Jutschenka did not run a detail business.

- Many entries, such as the one on Gerson-Prager Hausdorff, contain no real information, neither about the character of the company nor about its owner families: “Die Firmen Vereinigte Modehäuser gehörten zu den wichtigsten Salons” (the businesses were some of the most important salons, p. 240) is the only information in three and a half lines. Neither the real achievements of the fashion house, the exciting networks of the company and the owner families, nor the murder of Isidor Gerson-Prager in Minsk in 1942 are apparently known to Westphal.
- The company Gebr. Berglas with its prominent business location at *Hausvogteiplatz 1*, which was presented in detail at the exhibition “Geraubte Mitte” 2013/14, it produced worsted yarns and was one of the largest German fabric producers, was according to Westphal a “ladies’ coat maker” at Hausvogteiplatz 5/6 (p. 234), owned by “David Berglas” (correction: Max, Alexander, Alfred and Jakob Berglas). Westphal does not mention, or is not aware of, the fact that swastika flags were produced in another commercial building belonging to the company at *Wallstraße 16*, after its “Aryanization” and that more than one million “Jewish stars” were produced after 1941, although a memorial plaque initiated by the descendant Dr. Joanne Intrator (New York) and Dr. Benedikt Goebel of the *Aktives Museum* have been commemorating this since 2018.
- In general, there is no information on dates of foundation of companies, closures or changes of ownership. As Westphal does not track changes of ownership, he is also unaware, for example, that the famous D. Levin company has belonged to the von Heinemann and Arthur Freudenberg family since 1913.
- For the company Hansen Bang, which is specifically mentioned in the chapter “Nine Fates” (p. 180), Westphal erroneously only gives the address of the “Aryanised” company, as in 1986/1992. However, as address book entries and archival material show, the company, which was founded in 1919 and then again in 1932, was not located at *Hausvogteiplatz* before the “Aryanisation,” but first at *Potsdamer Straße* and since 1932 at *Friedrichstraße*.
- The Freudenberg family, who played a decisive role in shaping the fashion city of Berlin, is not mentioned at all in the alphabetical appendix of the book. Their merits and fates in emigration are apparently not worthy of mention in Westphal, despite extensive research (Kessemeier 2013). This example also makes the arbitrary, scientifically unchecked, but lexical listing of names, which according to Westphal in the 1980s was almost exclusively based on information from contemporary witnesses, appear very questionable.
- Westphal considered N. Israel the “oldest department store in Berlin” (p. 25), although this is clearly wrong. Likewise, the claim that the companies N. Israel and Rudolph Hertzog were co-founders of the Berlin confectionery industry (p. 36). Both companies were only offering ready-made fashion shortly before the turn of the century. The misleading eyewitness statement, N. Israel had been “on Kurfürstendamm” (p. 244) was not corrected by Westphal.

- Westphal's general statements on Berlin fashion are also misleading, when he claims that in Berlin, unlike in the "Parisian couture houses", no furs were processed (see p. 95). Fur coats and fur-trimmed coats and evening capes were one of the specialities of well-known Berlin fashion houses.
- The information on the companies V. Manheimer and Gebr. Manheimer is completely wrong. Here Westphal only reproduces well-known myths of the journalist Brunhilde Dähn from the year 1968. He did not make any effort to conduct new research of his own. The claim that the V. Manheimer company was "sold in 1931 in the greatest financial distress" (p. 166) is invented. The company went bankrupt, the shop in *Oberwallstraße* closed already at the end of 1927, as the latest research by Kessemeier (2018/19) showed.
- It also becomes clear that Westphal is obviously not aware that Rudolph Hertzog actively sought to "Aryanise" competitors in 1938. In this respect, he only makes a vague statement: "One should not speculate about the role of Rudolph Hertzog." (S. 139)
- Westphal wrongly counts the fashion salons Annemarie Heise, Hilda Romatzki, and also Schulze-Bibernell among the salons and textile merchants who "as former employees now took over the Jewish businesses" (pg. 131). This is fictitious. The fashion salons of Annemarie Heise and Hilda Romatzki, who after 1933 certainly profited from their good contacts in the highest Nazi circles, had already existed since the 1910s and 1920s respectively, whereas the Salon Schulze-Bibernell was a new foundation of former Gerson employees.
- Well-known fashion salons of the 1920s and 1930s, which were "liquidated" or "Aryanised" after 1933, such as the fashion salons of Clara Böhm, Moritz Hammer, or R.&P. Hirschfeld, on the other hand, are surprisingly unknown to Westphal and are not mentioned at all.

For a publication that is scientifically based and propagates the "emergence and destruction of Jewish clothing stores" in the years 1836 to 1939, it would have been desirable to learn fundamental facts and current research results in 2019. Westphal has missed an opportunity, and his book is harming research rather than benefiting it.

The question also arises as to whether it is right to speak unreflectively of "Jewish clothing stores," as many companies and owners did not see themselves as such until 1933 and people of many different denominations worked together in the companies. Only with the National Socialists did German and Berlin fashion houses become "Jewish fashion houses."

The most positive thing that can be said about the new edition is that it is graphically much clearer than the previous editions.

Gesa Kessemeier and Christine Waidenschlager for *netzwerk mode textil e.V.* (in German online since 16 May 2019)

*The footnotes refer to the page number in the German edition. We apologize for any discrepancies with the English edition.*